Automation in the air dulls pilot skill

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In this Feb. 12, 2009, file photo, a plane burns after it crashed into a house in Clarence Center, N.Y., Authorities say it was Continental Airlines Flight 3407 operated by Manassas, Va.-based Colgan Air. Airline industry and safety officials are concerned that pilots' flying skills are becoming rusty and their ability to handle unexpected situations is eroding because most flying is delegated to computers in today's highly automated planes. (AP Photo/David Duprey, File)

(AP) -- Safety and industry officials worry that there will be more deadly airline accidents traced to pilots who have lost their hands-on instincts as planes become ever more reliant on automation to navigate crowded skies.

The airline industry says hundreds of people have died over the past five years in 51 "loss of control" accidents in which planes stalled during flight or got into unusual positions that pilots could not correct. In some cases, pilots made the wrong split-second decision, with catastrophic

results.

One airline captain, Rory Kay, says pilots get so little time to manually fly planes that they're "forgetting how to fly." Kay is co-chairman of a Federal Aviation Administration committee on pilot training.

Regulations that require greater reliance on computerized flying are helping spur the trend.

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